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SUBJECT: EU: PARTING THOUGHTS FROM RELEX COMMISSIONER CHRIS PATTEN

Classified By: Political Counselor Kyle Scott. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador held a reflective October 6 farewell meeting with RELEX Commissioner Patten, whose term expires at the end of the month. Patten called the Commission's decision earlier that day to recommend in favor of starting accession negotiations with Turkey "the most important decision I've been a part of" at the Commission. Patten suggested that Atlantic powers "have two decades to shape the world" -- after that, economic and demographic trends argue in favor of India and China. Patten doubted whether the EU Constitution will ever be ratified, and worried about growing French disaffection with the EU that could lead Paris to "bring the temple down." He believes incoming Commission President Barosso has several advantages over his two immediate predecessors, but said Barosso is mistaken in trying run the Commission in presidential style. Patten suggested Commissioners Verheugen, Wallstrom, and Mandelson bear watching as future Commission heavyweights. He worried that the US and EU may split on Iran, and urged more visible US activity on the Middle East peace process. End summary.

Turkey

¶2. (C) Over drinks at the end of a long day, Patten was clearly pleased with the decision announced earlier in the day to recommend in favor of launching accession negotiations with Turkey. He called it 'the most important decision I have taken part in during my entire tenure on the Commission.' Patten noted that at the beginning of the Prodi Commission, only he and Enlargement Commissioner Verheugen were in favor of Turkish enlargement. He stressed that the EU has proven very successful at reform, and that Europeans will increasingly come to realize the advantages of having Turkey inside the EU.

¶3. (C) In particular, Patten said that Turkish membership would make the EU a more serious player in defense, and also give it strategic weight in the Caucasus and Central Asia. He also pointed to the disturbing demographic trends in Europe, and the contribution that Turkey's large population could make in this regard. He predicted that smart investors will begin to pour money into Turkey (at times at the expense of other newer EU members in Central and Eastern Europe). Patten also expressed the view that the Erdogan/Gul duo was the "most impressive" leadership team in all of Europe today.

¶4. (C) Patten thanked the U.S. for its low-key approach to Turkish accession over the last few months, and encouraged US leaders to keep "piano" as well through the crucial Council decision in December.

EU - Amazing, But It Actually Works

¶5. (C) Patten expressed his own amazement that EU institutions, "pieced together with rubber bands, chewing gum and blue tack" actually perform. He refuted arguments that Europe has become sclerotic and unable to compete, but said he does have long-term concerns about basic demographic factors, and Europe's long-term competitiveness vis-a-vis rising powers in China and India. He suggested the Atlantic countries have two decades to shape the world. Beyond that, and he predicted economic and demographic trends favor a rise in power for India and China. He was particularly enthusiastic about India's future, noting that -- in contrast to China -- India's democratic system means it will not have to cope with new political structures as its economy rapidly expands.

¶6. (C) In the meantime, the EU will "continue to lumber along -- against all odds." The EU of today is neither the one envisioned by Monet and Schumann, nor the Europe managed by Adenauer and De Gaulle in years gone by. With the most recent enlargement, the Franco-German engine can no longer drive the Union, Patten said, and he was especially concerned that France was getting nervous about its waning influence. The lingua franca of the EU is now english, and countries appear increasingly willing to stand up to France and tell them "no." Barosso's decision to give France the minor Transport portfolio was a major blow, and Patten worried that

there is a growing feeling in Paris that it might be better to "bring the temple down."

¶7. (C) Patten also predicted that the EU Constitution would not be ratified, suggesting that it may fail to gain ratification in three or more countries.

The Barosso Commission

¶8. (C) Patten judged the incoming Commission President to be a "smart, cautious politician." He starts his tenure with several advantages over his two most recent predecessors, Patten suggested. First, he is extremely articulate in several languages. Secondly, he has been selected without any political obligations. This offered him additional room for maneuver, which he had used decisively in forming his Commission. Third, Barosso does not face any European leaders who are serious competitors in putting forward a vision for the future of Europe. (On the flip-side, Patten noted that there are also no political leaders in Europe who are prepared to make difficult decisions to pursue a visionary policy.)

¶9. (C) Still, Patten suggested Barosso was mistaken if he believed he could manage the Commission in presidential style. He said Barosso "should have begged" to keep either (outgoing Italian Commissioners) Monti or Vitorino, and then established a structure with three senior Vice Presidents: Monti/Vitorino, Verheugen, and Wallstrom. As it now stands, Patten predicted that Verheugen, Wallstrom, and incoming UK Commissioner Mandelson will be the centers of gravity in the Commission below Barosso. He suggested, however, that Wallstrom might in fact leave in the near future to pursue politics back in her home country.

On US-EU Relations

¶10. (C) Patten said managing transatlantic relations will remain a challenge no matter who wins in the US elections in November. Patten said many Europeans disagree with US policies, but not American values -- but posited that even this could not be guaranteed in the long run. In the post 9/11 world, every European now has a horror story about US visa/border entry hassles -- either personally or someone they know. The world's best and brightest, who traditionally went to the US to study and then stayed, are increasingly reluctant to do so -- a fact Patten said he hopes to capitalize on in his next job at Oxford University. Besides border policies, Europeans simply don't understand American attitudes about guns. For many of his countrymen in England, Patten suggested, Athens, Ohio is now more foreign than Athens, Greece. And yes, Patten admitted, there are many European elites who resent the United States precisely because America did Europe so many favors over the preceding decades.

¶11. (C) Still, Patten remains convinced that the EU will need to devote increased attention to transatlantic relations. That is why he pushed so hard to have a political appointee Ambassador selected for Washington (vice a Commission functionary). Patten noted that it took 15 months to get John Bruton's nomination through the bureaucracy -- and suggested in the end it only happened because Bruton is a close personal friend of Manuel Barosso.

¶12. (C) He advised the US to also re-think its relations with Europe. In so doing, Patten suggested the US should tell the EU that America will only listen to European views if Europe is also ready to play a serious role in implementing the policies adopted. He suggested the next US Administration approach Europe openly and say: we need this relationship, but what are you (Europe) going to contribute? If the US goes down the multilateral road Europe wants, will there be any Europeans at the end of the path if the bullets begin to fly? In a nutshell, he suggested the US should ask Europe ("courteously, of course") to ante up. Iran, he suggested, will be the next major test for the relationship. The West needed carrots to offer the Iranians, but also needed sticks. The Middle East is another area for more work, and Patten suggested the next US President needs to "look a little more energetic" in working the peace process.

Scott